PRESCHOOL PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES
(NON-ABBOTT)
OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
Fall 2003

WILLIAM LIBRERA
COMMISSIONER

RDON MACINNES
ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER
DIVISION OF ABBOTT IMPLEMENTATION

ELLEN C. FREDE
ASSISTANT TO THE COMMISSIONER
OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
P.O. Box 500
Trenton NJ 08625

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

These guidelines are based on the *Abbott Preschool Program Implementation Guidelines* and have been revised from the original format to align with the requirements for serving three-and four-year-old children in state-funded preschool programs in other school districts. The original Program Implementation Guidelines were drafted in conjunction with stakeholders chosen for their diversity and expertise in the field of early childhood education, education policy and educational law and their unwavering commitment to the children of the state of New Jersey.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

NEW JERSEY STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

ARNOLD G. HYNDMAN President	Belvidere
DEBRA CASHA Vice President	Kinnelon
MARGARET F. BARTLETT	Pine Beach
RONALD K. BUTCHER	Pitman
MAUD DAHME	Annandale
KATHLEEN A. DIETZ	Hillsborough
ANNE S. DILLMAN	Perth Amboy
ORLANDO EDREIRA	Elizabeth
JOHN A. GRIFFITH	Montclair
THELMA NAPOLEON-SMITH	Trenton
SAMUEL J. PODIETZ	Lumberton
EDWARD M. TAYLOR	Somerdale
ROBERTA VAN ANDA	Rumson

WILLIAM L. LIBRERA, Ed.D, Commissioner of Education
Secretary

PRESCHOOL PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES (NON-ABBOTT)

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance from the Department of Education (DOE) to enable school districts receiving Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA) and/or Early Launch to Learning Initiative (ELLI) funds to plan and implement evidence-based preschool programs. These guidelines will help school districts plan, develop and realize high-quality preschool programs for three- and four-year-old children. The guidelines are derived from research, wherever possible, and on expert opinion where research is not available. In general, the guidelines provide recommendations and not mandates in an effort to accommodate local conditions, contexts and needs. Operational plans should be based on these guidelines and designed to meet the *Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations: Standards of Quality.*

District plans should be driven by the research-based best practices, offered in this document, and a systematic assessment of the needs of children in the district. Districts, with the technical assistance of the New Jersey Department of Education, will provide universally high-quality preschool programs via a locally-determined mix of school-based, child-care and Head Start classrooms.

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

The *Comprehensive Educational Improvement and Financing Act* of 1996 provided children in New Jersey's Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA) districts the opportunity to receive a high-quality preschool education beginning at age four. The Early Launch to Learning Initiative, proposed in the FY 05 budget, is intended to spread these benefits to other districts. The purpose is to prepare these children to enter kindergarten with skills and abilities more comparable to those of their wealthier suburban peers. High-quality preschool programs can close much of the early achievement gap for lower-income children. This substantially increases their school success and produces a host of lifelong benefits, including increased school achievement and social and economic success as adults. These goals can be reached through the creation and support of high-quality preschool programs for all eligible children.

A district must include the following components in the program:

(1) District-wide planning;
(2) Community collaboration and planning;
(3) Curriculum development and implementation;
(4) Professional development and training; and
(5) Parent involvement and other support services.

These components are the essential minimum ingredients of effective preschool education. High teacher and teacher assistant quality are imperative. Enrollment should remain low with a recommended ratio of 1:15 in any preschool classroom. Facilities should be large enough (950 square feet per classroom for new construction) and organized for the activities of preschool children, which differ in most respects from the activities of grade-school children.

Districts should conduct local needs assessments to develop program plans that meet the specific needs of their children. The basic program components offer a framework for individual districts to use when developing their plan and when evaluating how well children and their communities are being served.

Benefits of Preschool Education

Children who spend the early years of their lives in poverty enter school with academic and, to some extent, social abilities that are far below their potential.

Research has now established that many of the chronic problems plaguing schools, such as high rates of early school failure, low scores on standardized tests, high rates of grade repetition, and high dropout rates, can be traced to children from disadvantaged families with poor skills upon school entry. Children in the lowest-achieving schools, however, have been found to learn just as much as more advantaged peers in higher-achieving schools (Alexander & Entwistle, 1989). Many simply start out so far behind that they never catch up with the expectations of the school. High-quality preschool programs seek

to remedy this problem by providing rich educational experiences in the years prior to kindergarten.

High-quality preschool programs have been shown to dramatically raise children's abilities at school entry, increase early and later achievement test scores, reduce grade repetition and placement in special education, and boost graduation rates (Barnett, 1997). Some of the strongest evidence of long-term benefits is provided by three longitudinal studies -- the High/Scope Perry Preschool study (Schweinhart et al., 1993; Barnett, 1996), the Abecedarian study (Ramey et al., 2000; Ramey & Campbell, 1984; Campbell et al., forthcoming), and the Chicago Child-Parent Center study (Reynolds, 2000).

In these studies, children from very low-income families were served in preschool programs with highly qualified teachers and small class sizes. Research over 25 years documented a chain of effects beginning with early increases in children's cognitive abilities and leading to broad improvements in achievement and social behavior. Follow-ups revealed the following strong effects:

- higher achievement test scores and school grades,
- less special education,
- higher graduation rates,
- increased adult employment and earnings, and
- less delinquency and crime.

It is clear that high-quality preschool programs with qualities like those mandated by the court for Abbott districts produce substantial improvements in the school success of disadvantaged children, and, in particular, low-income urban children. It is even more remarkable that these programs have been found to result in benefits to taxpayers that far exceed the costs of very expensive high-quality preschool programs. On the other hand, low-quality programs do not produce the same gains and are "penny wise and pound foolish." (Barnett, 1996)

Preschool programs that close much of the achievement gap between cities and suburbs would simultaneously help a large number of the state's children and provide an economic boost to the entire state. Thus, the ECPA and ELLI funds will offer the promise of important gains to all of the state's citizens. However, it cannot be overemphasized that the benefits will only be reaped if intensive, high-quality preschool programs are provided to all children in the ECPA districts.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The Need for Local Collaboration

It is considerably easier for children to develop and learn with the support of strong families, who, in turn, enjoy the support of individuals and institutions in their surrounding communities. However, the increase in single-parent and dual-income families, coupled with the gradual disappearance of small communities, leaves a growing number of children and families isolated from helping relationships, peer and emotional support, and access to referral services (Weiss, Woodrum, Lopez, & Kraemer, 1993).

When families, schools, and community institutions (e.g., local businesses, community colleges, and health agencies) collectively agree upon their goals and decide how to reach them, everyone benefits. Schools enjoy the informed support of families and community members, families experience many opportunities to contribute to their children's education, and communities look forward to an educated, responsible workforce. Benefits are found for staff of schools and community agencies, as well, with boosts in morale, heightened engagement in their work, and a feeling that their work will net results (Stone, 1993).

Researchers and practitioners have documented for some time how schools and communities working toward common goals can be beneficial (Stone, 1993). Communities can complement and reinforce the values, culture, and learning the schools provide for their students or negate much of what the schools strive to accomplish (Ada, 1994; Bricker, 1989; Nieto, 1992). Communities also can furnish schools and the students in them with crucial financial support systems, as well as the social and cultural values necessary for success and survival (Mattessich & Monsey, 1993; MDC, Inc., 1991; Miller, 1991). Finally, communities have the potential to extend social, cultural and vocational opportunities to students and their families (Bell & Sigsworth, 1987; Hull, 1994).

Schools, in turn, offer communities a focal point of educational services for children. Symbolically, schools are seen by many as the last enduring public institutions in many communities (Lockwood, forthcoming). Instruction typically includes lessons in social and cultural skills -- particularly in the elementary grades -- in addition to acculturation into mainstream values and ethics. Schools frequently provide employment for community residents and, in some cases, offer community services. Most importantly, schools have the potential to produce well-educated citizens ready to take on responsibilities as contributing community members (Stone, 1993).

By working together, schools, families and communities can prepare for a more promising future. In urban communities struggling against violence, unemployment and deteriorating institutions, school-community collaboration offers hope for those who may have given up on the social institutions in their neighborhoods and cities.

Rural communities searching for opportunities to revitalize themselves in a technologically sophisticated society can discover ways to bring themselves into the information age by intertwining school and community improvement initiatives (Stone, 1993).

Because community involvement is so crucial to effective education, the one-year plan should be formulated in collaboration with the community to capitalize on the community's expertise and vision for the future and to ensure that the plan has widespread community support. However, the responsibility for the plan rests with the superintendent and the early childhood contact person and must be approved by the board of education.

Definition of Collaboration

Collaboration is defined as the inclusion of stakeholders in a coordinated approach to planning and service delivery through shared leadership, decisions, ownership, vision, responsibility, and accountability. In nearly all collaborative processes, partners come together, establish common goals, share responsibility and accountability, agree to commit resources and change existing policies and procedures to achieve their goals. Collaborative relationships require communication that values and respects the opinion, perspectives and rights of each partner. The process will move ahead when the focus is on building trust and mutual respect, clarifying roles and expectations, listening actively and communicating clearly.

It should be noted that the opportunity for collaboration does not guarantee an effective and truly collaborative process. Only the participants can do this. However, recognition of the research supporting collaboration and the impact it can have on developing and maintaining a high-quality preschool program should be enough to convince well-intentioned people of the urgency to work together. Further, as a district-sponsored initiative, local collaboration will not be effective without support from the top, namely, the district central office. If it has this support, the rest is up to the team of participants.

To ensure effective collaboration, the following is recommended:

- An Early Childhood Education Advisory Council should be established to review and provide comment on the operational plan. This will provide an opportunity for local stakeholders to participate in community-wide planning, as conducted by the school district, to review progress towards implementing high-quality programs, and to address issues that arise during implementation.

Recommended Model: The following practices will help identify and provide services that match the needs of the children and their communities.

The council might include, but not be limited to, representatives of the following groups:

- child-care providers, pediatric medical day care providers, Head Start agencies, child and family advocates, municipal government, health professionals/agencies, social service providers, higher education, philanthropic community, mental health agencies, district central office, teacher's union, business community, parents, kindergarten/1st grade teacher(s), bilingual education specialists, supervisors and administrative organizations, early intervention/special education groups, and community groups, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Urban League, churches, YMCA/YWCA, and the New Jersey Association for the Education of Young Children (NJAEYC).

Recommended Responsibilities of the Council

- participate in the community assessment of specific community needs and resources, including facilities, as they pertain to the implementation of high-quality preschool services.
- participate in the development of the Operational Plan as organized by the district preschool leadership.
- review and comment on the draft Operational Plan.
- review and comment on preschool budgets proposed by the district.

Structure and Operations:

To implement local collaboration as defined here, the council should do the following:

- meet monthly when appropriate;
- elect its own leadership and adopt its own bylaws;
- be led by elected co-chairs, consisting of one district representative and one community representative;
- receive a small, operating grant from the state to cover costs of meetings, communication, training, technical assistance, and retreats; and
- include voluntary representation from the list of possible stakeholders, institutions, and organizations described above. Once organized, new representation may be added, as needed.

RECRUITMENT AND ENROLLMENT

All four-year-old children must be offered access to quality preschool programs. Issues such as toilet training, immigration status, and other individual circumstances cannot prevent a child from receiving services. The department recognizes that the dynamic nature of communities may result in changes in outreach strategies from one year to the next, and that the same groups may not be involved in the recruitment effort each year. Individual districts are unique and, therefore, no one strategy will work across districts. The school district should take the time to research and analyze the most effective public information strategies for its community.

Every community has a broad spectrum of organizations, both religious and social, that can assist the district in the recruitment process. Community groups that might be consulted include the following:

- Ministers from churches, synagogues, or other houses of worship representing denominations of families in the school district;
- Social clubs, community groups and nationally recognized organizations (scouting, YMCA, Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, Police Athletic Leagues, Hispanic and black coalitions, etc.;
- Local employers;
- Local, state or national agencies and/or charitable groups (e.g. Division of Youth and Family Services, Volunteers of America, Salvation Army);
- Professional and labor organizations; and
- Hospitals and pediatricians.

The following strategies will help ensure public awareness:

- Using private child-care providers to assist in recruitment efforts;
- Using a variety of channels when establishing contact with the families;
- Placing fliers and/or bulletins in shopping bags at stores, doctors' offices, laundromats, beauty salons, restaurants, etc. Information should be presented in the language (s) of the community in a clear, direct format;
- Making phone information services available in all appropriate languages;
- Including information about the availability of child evaluation and special education services in recruitment materials;
- Making the presentation in appropriate languages, if government/municipal access cable television channel is used and/or local radio public service announcements;
- Encouraging local politicians to endorse the preschool program in newsletters, political mailings, campaign literature, etc.;
- Sending sound cars throughout district neighborhoods prior to registration dates, providing enrollment messages that advertise dates and times of registration;

- Holding recruitment fairs in the neighborhood at local churches, rather than government/municipal offices, so that residents will feel comfortable; and
- Providing information at community events with knowledgeable people on site who can answer questions.

Recruitment is ongoing and takes time, creativity, and energy. The goal should be to demonstrate program growth toward registering at least 90 percent of four-year-old children from the district in the preschool program. The school district's strategies must be in earnest and assigned to individuals who know the community and understand the necessity of public relations. Districts should establish centralized enrollment procedures that occur year-round. The benefits of preschool are only obtained by those who participate.

ADMINISTRATION

Central to program success are educational leadership and administrative oversight (NAEYC, 1998; National Study of School Evaluation, 2002; Frede, 1997). Administrators play an integral role in determining the quality of the many program components from the supervision of teachers to recruitment and outreach efforts. Because administrative personnel perform such a critical role, this document sets forth guidelines to maximize the effectiveness of their skills, expertise and time. The primary administrative responsibilities in ECPA and ELLI districts are as follows:

- development and execution of the One-year Operational Plan;
- oversight of the budget, coordination of program services (e.g. bilingual, special education, social and health); and
- supervision of administrative and program staff.

Ultimate responsibility for the implementation of the plan rests with the superintendent and designated district personnel. The designated person should oversee professional development and best program practices, manage the recruitment/outreach efforts, and ensure the coordination and delivery of comprehensive services, including parent involvement. This individual may conduct some of the formal evaluations of the classroom teachers. He or she must be well versed in strategies designed to help teachers and other professionals optimize children's learning and development.

Administrative support personnel, such as secretaries and data clerks, are essential to the daily operations of any program. Support staff responsibilities may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- enrollment and registration of preschool children;
- data collection and entry;
- clerical assistance to supervisors, directors and other personnel; and
- providing general program information to families in a friendly and helpful fashion.

THE EDUCATIONAL COMPONENTS

1. CURRICULUM

During the latter half of the twentieth century, interest in the connection between curriculum and opposing theories of development was of great interest. Multiple curriculum approaches were developed that were derived directly from the dominant developmental theories. These represented three broad streams of thinking about development and learning -- didactic or direct instruction, open classroom or traditional nursery school, and interactive or constructivist approaches. In a *didactic* or *direct instruction curriculum,* the teacher presents information to the children in structured, drill-and-practice group lessons that are fast-paced, teach discrete skills in small steps, and involve frequent praise. *Open classroom* or *traditional approaches* flow from the belief that children must direct their own learning and will learn when they are ready, as long as the teachers provide stimulating materials and support for the children's choices. Socialization is often the main goal of this curriculum. Adherents of *interactive* or *constructivist curriculum* view learning as an active exchange between the child and his/her environment, one key element of which is the teacher. In this model, teachers initiate activities designed to foster children's reasoning and problem-solving abilities, and they interact with children during child-designed activities to add new ideas or enhance learning. Peer-to-peer interaction is also viewed as essential to the learning process (Frede, 1997). The interactive or constructivist approach is the only one that meets the criteria for high quality based on effective research.

Curriculum, broadly speaking, is what schools teach. This includes all that is planned for children in the classroom, such as learning centers, morning circle, or a teacher-initiated small-group activity. Curriculum also includes the unplanned, such as those experiences a child has while building a bridge with paper towel tubes, string, and popsicle sticks; waiting for the bus; eating at the snack table; or having a temper tantrum. Curriculum, then, is the entire range of experiences that children have at school. Content objectives and learning outcomes, knowledge of child development, and careful observation of the needs and interests of individual children guide curriculum. The National Association for the Education of Young Children terms this "developmentally appropriate practice" (NAEYC, 1998). Developmentally appropriate practice follows the interactive or constructivist approach.

The Office of Early Childhood Education has developed the *Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations: Standards of Quality* that delineates effective teaching practices linked to developmentally appropriate learning outcomes. This should be the framework for planning and adopting curricula for ECPA and ELLI classrooms. It is not meant to replace preplanned curricula, but instead to be a guide for making important curricular decisions both planned and unplanned. Expertise in child development and the types of experiences that support individual variations in learning are key to creating model curricula. There is no one "best" curriculum for all programs. There are many excellent curriculum models that meet the guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice and the OECE's *Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations: Standards of Quality*.

2. THE LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND DOCUMENTATION PROCESS

Assessment of young children is an ongoing process that documents evidence of early learning, in order to make informed instructional decisions. This evidence may include anecdotal records of children's conversations and behaviors in individual, small- and large-group situations, samples of artwork and drawings, and photographs, recordings or other records of children engaged in activities and play.

Documentation, a preliminary stage in the assessment process, focuses on identifying, collecting, and describing the evidence of learning in an objective, nonjudgmental manner. Teachers should, on a regular basis, take the time to track children's emerging skills, identify learning goals, and share the information with colleagues. Based on this information, new curriculum strategies may be generated or additional questions may be posed. Careful documentation and assessment can increase the teacher's understanding of normal child development, assist in understanding the needs of the children in a specific class, and enhance the teacher's ability to reflect on the instructional program.

Major Purpose of Assessment in Preschool Education

The primary purpose of the assessment of young children is to help educators determine appropriate classroom activities for individuals and groups of children.

The documentation/assessment process should do the following:

- Build on multiple forms of evidence of the child's learning;
- Take place over a period of time;
- Reflect the understanding of groups, as well as of individual children; and
- Reflect sensitivity to each child's special needs, home language, learning style, and developmental stage.

The information from the documentation/assessment process should do the following:

- Connect to developmentally appropriate learning goals;
- Add to an understanding of the child's growth and development;
- Provide information that can be applied directly to instructional planning; and
- Be shared with the child's family and special education personnel, when appropriate.

Importance of the Documentation/Assessment Process for Teachers' Professional Development

Teachers who use the documentation/assessment process enhance their ability to do the following:

- Respond more easily and effectively to demands for accountability;

- Teach more effectively, using interactive experiences that enhance children's development;
- Make more productive instructional planning decisions (e.g., how to set up the classroom, what to do next, what questions to ask, what resources to provide, how to stimulate each child's development, and what external support systems are required);
- Meet more of children's special needs within the classroom. The ongoing process of identifying, collecting, describing, interpreting, and applying classroom-based evidence can help the teacher to become more aware and develop a broader repertoire of instruction strategies; and
- Identify the most appropriate learning experiences for children.

The documentation/assessment process can also help young children to perceive learning as important and worthwhile, as they observe their teachers actively engaged in documenting their learning.

Portfolio Documentation

Portfolio assessment is the systematic and intentional collection and interpretation of significant samples of children's work. The portfolio process should clearly indicate the learning goals, illustrate and document children's development over a period of time, actively involve children, and reflect each child's individual development, based on the expectations of the child for the year.

Some strategies for portfolio documentation are as follows:

- Determine the developmental areas to be assessed (e.g., spoken language, art, early literacy, symbolic play, motor skills, math concepts, creativity and peer relationships);
- Identify the documents which best demonstrate development (e.g., drawings, paintings, other artwork, photos, dictated stories, book choices, teacher's notes, audiotapes, graphs and checklists);
- Regularly create a collection of samples with children's input (i.e., record what the children tell you about a variety of things);
- Develop a storage system for the samples of children's work;
- Describe the documents with colleagues in order to gain additional perspectives on the child's development (i.e., study groups of teachers can be formed to collect and describe samples of children's work);
- Connect the children's work to the learning goals;
- Identify any gaps in the developmental story, ensuring that the samples show the full range of what each child can do; and
- Collect data that tells a clear story to the audience.

Observation

Observation of young children is critical in the documentation and assessment process. However, observation is a skill that must be developed and perfected by the teacher over time. In the process of observing children, teachers can make use of the following techniques: rating forms, photography, narrative description, anecdotes, videotaping, journals, and the conversations of individual children and groups. Observation must be intentional. As part of the daily classroom routine, it is probably the most authentic form of assessment. Observing children in their daily preschool experience is the best place to start when creating a real-life profile of each child.

What to observe:

- Dispositions (trends in behavior or activity that reflect particular learning styles and motivators);
- Coping strategies (i.e., notice how a child solves a problem);
- Social interactions, including withdrawal or isolation (i.e., determine the child's place in the group); and
- Key attributes of the child (i.e., identify and list interests and play patterns).

How to observe:

- Regularly, with a specific purpose;
- At different times of the day;
- In different settings throughout the school or center;
- Considering the usual demeanor of the child, not the unusual behavior or bad days; and
- For new possibilities. If a child is having trouble, could the environment or circumstances be changed to assist the child?

The Parents

Parents should be partners in the accurate and sensitive assessment of young children. The following practices help encourage parental involvement in child assessments:

- Accentuate the positive when discussing children;
- Talk about child observations informally, during everyday conversations with parents;
- Explain assessment approaches at a parent meeting or workshop. Be clear about the differences between standardized tests and authentic assessment;
- Write about assessment in a newsletter or a special letter home;
- Demonstrate that parents are respected partners in the documentation of behavior and progress of children; and
- Support comments with documentation showing what the child has accomplished over time.

The Children

Everyone has a view of a child's abilities, preferences, and behaviors, including the child. The following will effectively involve the children in their own assessment:

- Observe and document things the children say and do. Often random statements such as, "I was this big on my last birthday, now I'm THIS big," are evidence that children are capable of assessing what they can do and how they are changing.
- Ask children about themselves. Children will tell you what they do and do not like to do. Some children may be pleased by a conference-like situation in which they have your undivided attention, while others may respond to more informal discussions.
- Ask children to assess their work. Ask children to help decide which work should be included in their portfolio. Respect their choices and responses about their work.
- Let children take pictures of their most prized work from time to time. They can make a bulletin board display of their specially chosen picture portfolio.

Achievement Tests

Individual- and group-administered norm-referenced tests of achievement are usually inappropriate tools for assessing young children's development. Such instruments are not typically designed to provide information on how children learn, how they might apply their learning to real-life situations, or how the test results relate to the teacher's instructional goals and planning. Instructional planning should be grounded in the evidence of children's learning that reflects their activities as closely as possible, such as records of their language and samples of their work.

Developmental Screening Measures

At times, the typical preschool instructional program may not be adequate in supporting a specific child's development. Individual developmental screening measures may be used to identify children who have major impediments to learning, such as problems in the development of language, or with vision or hearing. In such cases, the results of screening measures should be used to determine whether a child needs further comprehensive diagnostic assessment.

Information received from a single developmental assessment or screening should never serve as the basis for major decisions affecting a child's placement or enrollment. Assessment should be tailored to a specific purpose and should be used only for the purpose for which it has consistently demonstrated reliable results.

Referral for an Evaluation

When a parent or teacher has a concern and suspects a potential disability, a written referral to the district's child study team should occur. The child may be eligible for special education. The parent, preschool teacher, and the team will meet to determine the need for evaluation and discuss the assessments to be completed. After completion of the evaluation and a determination of eligibility, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) will be developed. In addition to special education personnel, the team will always include the parent and the preschool teacher. The team will determine what types of support are necessary, such as modifications to the classroom or special education services. To the maximum extent appropriate, preschoolers with disabilities should receive their preschool education with their peers.

3. TEACHER TRAINING

Professional Development

Each ECPA school district will submit a district-wide professional development plan for preschool and kindergarten teachers as part of the One-year Operational Plan. This plan should be designed to achieve the *Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations: Standards of Quality*. The professional development plan should be directly related to the district's long-term vision. It should include provisions for systematic ongoing training and be based on research on adult learning and children's development, as well as on a formal needs assessment. In addition to inservice workshops, various professional development techniques may be incorporated, such as mentoring, peer coaching, modeling, self-assessment, observation and feedback, and team development. The plan should also include steps to evaluate the effectiveness of each professional development strategy.

Classroom Evaluation

Using systematic classroom observation data to plan professional development for preschool teachers and assistant teachers is also necessary for improving quality. Districts should use a structured observation instrument or set of instruments to measure quality practices in preschool classrooms. Through examination of individual classroom data and aggregate district data, finely tuned professional development can be planned. Teachers and districts then set goals for themselves and provide training opportunities to improve weaker areas.

To ensure quality, on an annual basis, a program quality assessment instrument such as the Preschool Quality Assessment (High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 1998) or Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale - Revised (Harms & Clifford, 1998) should be used. The district should establish a minimum acceptable score. Improvement plans should be developed for classrooms that fall below this score. The superintendent or designee will work with the teachers and the principal or director to identify improvements needed and establish a timeframe for making changes, providing assistance when necessary. The superintendent, principal and early childhood program contact person should participate in discussions to determine if the program improvements have been met.

District-wide Professional Development

Too often, district staff members are not knowledgeable about "best practices" or curricula for preschool and may have inappropriate expectations for this age group. Therefore, district-wide professional development should be available that includes the benefits of preschool education and the elements of effective preschool tailored to the different audiences. For example, administrators need information, including, but not limited to, criteria for evaluating preschool teachers; preschool language and literacy, including the needs of second language learners; knowledge of the components of the curriculum; and appropriate adult-child interaction strategies, particularly classroom management. Specialists should learn about the specific standards and techniques in their content areas for working with young children, while child study teams, social workers, and their administrators need information on appropriate assessments and intervention methods for young children. Additional support staff, including lunch assistants, custodians, and bus drivers, should receive information about interacting with young children.

The professional development plan should address administrators, teachers, child-care directors, and teachers that are in-district, private and Head Start. It should address other educational staff, including all teachers of the handicapped, child study team members, speech and language therapists, social workers, learning consultants, occupational therapists, behavioral specialists, and nurses. It should also support teacher assistants, parent liaisons, and any other support staff. An approach which supports learners' construction of new ideas or concepts based upon their current knowledge should be used in developing the plan.

Teacher Professional Development

In 2000, the New Jersey Department of Education introduced a requirement for teachers to pursue 100 hours of professional development over a five-year period. These professional development hours are to focus on training in implementation of the Core Curriculum Content Standards and related topics. With the publication of the revised *Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations: Standards of Quality*, a base has been formed for the appropriate preparation of preschool teachers. Since so many new teachers are entering the field, and many more teachers are joining the ranks of early childhood teaching from other grades and disciplines, it will be essential to ensure that all teachers working with young children are grounded in the knowledge base of preschool education. This knowledge base includes the following aspects of developmentally appropriate practice:

- Knowledge of child development, including research on the relationship between early experiences and brain development;
- Design of the learning environment;
- Curriculum design and assessment;
- Classroom management techniques;
- Emergent literacy;

- Enhancing problem-solving, skill development, and integrated content knowledge in math, social studies, science, the arts, and other domains of learning;
- Promoting social competence and healthy emotional development;
- Observation and appropriate assessment;
- Cultural competence;
- Inclusion practices;
- Methods for enhancing language development in the home language, as well as English;
- Technology in the preschool classroom; and
- Family and community involvement.

These training topics should be required for all teachers and delivered in a systematic on-going basis. All training should include relevant theory and current research and their applications to classroom practice.

Based on the individual needs of the district, teaching staff should attend a variety of workshops each year. In addition to professional development opportunities that can take place in the classroom or after school, districts will be provided funds for district-wide staff development activities for five full days of preschool education curriculum training. This professional development should be tailored to meet the needs identified in classroom evaluations. Preschool teachers should attend building- or district-wide training, if appropriate.

Consultants

A district may decide that an in-house professional development specialist or teacher trainer is necessary to provide professional development experiences for all teaching staff.

Peer Tutoring

The value of teachers' learning and working together is well recognized. Opportunities should be provided for teachers to observe each other and to collaborate on curriculum development and meeting student needs. Teachers may need guidance or training in how to use the collaborative time effectively. Each district should develop a plan to allow teacher-teacher interactions to become more regular than incidental.

Conferences

Participation in large conferences, while worthwhile, does not substitute for ongoing professional development. Local, state, or regional conferences tend to offer few opportunities for active participation and hands-on experiences. In addition, there is no current method to evaluate how conference attendance meets professional development goals.

4. SUPPORTING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

The issue of how to best support the development and education of children who come to school speaking languages other than English has been under debate (Zehr, 2000). Some parents and educators feel that children should only speak English in school. Others believe that teachers should teach in the child's native language. The answer appears to be somewhere in between.

Best practice dictates that both English and the child's home language should be actively supported (McLaughlin, 1995; Snow, 1993; TESOL Standards). To be successful in U.S. schools and, ultimately, the workplace, children need to be fluent in English. The concept that young children don't have to work hard to develop a second language is a myth (Snow, 1993), although younger learners generally learn their second language in the context of meaningful interactions that lend themselves to picking up the meanings of the words they hear (Snow, 1993; Genishi, 2002). It is equally important, however, that educators be alert to findings that suggest that young English language learners can easily lose their first languages (Snow, 1993). Consequently, all educational programs for young English language learners should focus on both first-language maintenance, as well as English proficiency.

The lack of attention paid to the needs of English language learners is easy to identify in classrooms. While the vast majority of classrooms that serve children learning English have at least one adult who speaks the children's home language, this is often the teacher assistant. In public school classrooms, only 50 percent of the teachers who teach Spanish-speaking children actually speak Spanish. The majority of these classrooms use Spanish to give directions to children when they do not understand English, rather than supporting development through bilingual interactions and materials. Teachers need extra guidance and support to effectively meet the needs of all students in multilanguage classrooms via a sustained, concerted effort.

Optimal Teacher Qualifications

Effectively delivering instruction to meet the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse children takes a great deal of skill and knowledge. To optimize the delivery of services to English language learners, ideally, both the teacher and the teacher assistant will speak the languages of the children in their classroom. Both English and the children's native language need to be supported in order to provide an optimal learning environment. If teachers speak both languages, they can facilitate language learning of both the native language and English. For classrooms in which children speak a variety of languages, teachers should integrate English language learner strategies throughout the curriculum.

Optimal Program Characteristics

The support of children's emerging skills in all areas is equally important in the preschool curriculum (physical, social, cognitive, etc.). However, the language development and

acquisition of English language learners are maximized in language-rich settings. The following classroom characteristics will help to ensure an effective program:

- Though every aspect of the child is considered in decisions about daily activities, the teacher modifies his/her teaching style by always keeping language in the forefront.
- Teachers immerse children in meaningful language experiences. They use on-the-spot labeling strategies with familiar, culturally sensitive themes and materials. Teachers avoid teaching words without meaningful contexts. For example, teachers use simultaneous translation, sing songs and read books in both languages, and use multiple media to connect language with objects and actions.
- The setting offers numerous opportunities for informal language exposure and practice. For example, songs and rhymes that naturally repeat and teach sentence patterns are part of the daily routine.
- Functional print in the classrooms, such as birthday charts, materials, and play areas are sometimes labeled with pictures and words in English, sometimes in the children's native languages, providing regular, informal exposure.
- Storybooks and other materials are available in all languages of the students.
- Children have numerous opportunities to create and share their own pictures, books, and stories. These child-generated texts make literacy a more meaningful activity that reflects the child's individual culture and experience.
- Teachers encourage social interaction between English-speaking and English language learners, encouraging them to speak each other's languages, giving them motivation to experiment with their growing language skills, providing translation, when appropriate.
- Numerous opportunities for language practice are available via fun games and activities, e.g., games such as "Simon Dice" (Simon Says) are used to review parts of the body. Open-ended language opportunities are created that encourage child-initiated conversation.
- The teacher's approach to language learning is always nonthreatening, and is designed to build confidence. As children learn both first and second languages, errors are a normal part of the developmental process. Rather than having children repeat the "correct" way to say something, teachers gently rephrase or model, when appropriate.
- Daily activities are described using a range of cues so that everyone understands the routines and options (e.g., pictures, hand signals, body language, simple words).
- The setting has numerous pretend play materials such as puppets, dolls, animals and telephones that encourage language and conversation.

Other Important Program Features Related to Supporting English Language Learners

- Children are encouraged to continue speaking their first language in school and at home. Parents are aware of the importance of maintaining both languages and are provided with examples of tools and techniques to extend this learning at home.

- Teachers are well-versed and sensitive to the languages and cultures of their students.
- At parent-teacher meetings, and in other communications with children's families, the parents' primary language is used to communicate. Bilingual staff provide assistance with both written, phone and face-to-face interactions.

Several general factors have been identified that help ensure success in serving the needs of students learning English (Berman et al, 1995):

- All schools hold high expectations for learning and personal development of English language learners.
- The curriculum is integrated across all areas of development and revolves around meaningful student experiences.
- English language students become independent learners who learn at their own pace.
- Cooperative learning is used extensively.
- All schools are "parent-friendly" and have bilingual staff members.
- Time is used innovatively with built-in time for teacher collaboration, Saturday programs, and summer and after-school programs.
- The focus always remains on helping the students achieve English literacy and maintain their first language.

At all times, English language learners, as well as all other students, should receive systematic support for language acquisition in their natural preschool environment. Pull-out and push-in programs do not offer the continuous and comprehensive support children need and will not be funded by the Early Childhood Program Aid or ELLI grant. Teachers in the program must understand the process of language acquisition and be able to create a preschool environment that enhances oral language. To support these essential skills, assistance to the teaching staff will be provided through bilingual specialists and professional development opportunities.

5. SPECIAL EDUCATION

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) ensures that every child who is eligible for special education services receives a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Therefore, preschool children with disabilities should be afforded the opportunity to participate and interact in natural settings with their peers who do not have disabilities. Such settings include, but are not limited to, home and family, play groups, child care, nursery schools, Head Start programs, kindergarten and neighborhood school classrooms. Children with disabilities should be placed in general education classrooms in which the proportion of children with and without special needs reflects that of the general population. Access to well-trained general education teachers, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, mental health services and other necessary supports is integral to success. Inclusion has important educational and social benefits for all children (Frede, Lupo & Barnett, 2000).

Unfortunately, there are significant obstacles that currently prevent the realization of this vision. Many existing teachers, administrators and paraprofessionals have little, if any, formal training in addressing the varying needs of children with disabilities. The requirement for collaboration between school districts and private child-care providers has created both opportunities and challenges. Misunderstandings often exist between parents, school districts and private providers, creating an unnecessarily adversarial situation. Children, who are struggling, but not eligible for special education, are often over-identified, when other interventions may be more appropriate. Overcoming these obstacles will require a system of coordination, collaboration, and communication among all key stakeholders.

IDEA, previously the *Education of the Handicapped Act*, was originally passed by the U.S. Congress in 1975 as Public Law 94-142. Its purpose was to ensure that all children with disabilities in the United States had access to a free and appropriate public education. In the years that followed, IDEA was amended several times with the most significant revisions occurring in 1997. To improve the educational outcomes for children with disabilities, the following changes were included:

- Early identification and provision of services;
- Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) that focus on meeting needs within classrooms;
- Education in classrooms with children without disabilities;
- Higher expectations for children with disabilities and agency accountability; and
- Strengthened role of parents and partnerships between parents and schools.
  (Federal Register, October 22, 1997, pgs. 55028-9. IDEA Requirements for Preschoolers with Disabilities, Idea Partnerships, p. 1).

Although districts in New Jersey vary in their services to preschool children with disabilities, all districts, including ECPA and ELLI districts, are required by federal law to serve children in inclusive settings to the maximum extent possible unless the individualized education program (IEP) objectives cannot be met in a general education classroom. Thus, the burden is on the IEP team to determine the least restrictive environment**.**

Screening

According to findings of the National Research Council (2002)**,** locally driven, universal screening of young children is associated with better outcomes for all children and will help identify those most at risk for achievement and behavior problems. It is recommended that all four-year-old and kindergarten children who are enrolled in an ECPA and ELLI preschool programs be administered an initial screening device, such as the Early Screening Inventory (Meisels et al., 1997). This information must never be used to determine or deny placement. Rather, it is used to determine if a child is within the 1) normal range of development, 2) re-screen range or 3) refer range, demonstrating the need for a referral for a diagnostic evaluation for special education.

Pre-Referral

When a child in the classroom is demonstrating learning or behavioral difficulties, it is up to the classroom teacher to closely observe and document the child's behavior. In order to support the child who is having difficulties, the teacher will attempt to adapt the activities and environment to meet the child's distinct learning or behavioral needs. The teacher will also enlist the help of the child's parents as the primary source of information concerning the child. Another resource is the district's child study team who will collaborate with the classroom teacher to provide additional strategies to meet the child's needs and to facilitate full participation in the preschool classroom. Licensed social workers can help with additional family and community outreach to support the child's needs.

If the parent or the classroom teacher suspects that the child has a disability, by law, a written referral can be made by the parent or teacher directly to the appropriate school official. The school official must expedite the written referral and within 20 days (excluding school holidays) arrange to hold a meeting to decide whether an evaluation will be conducted.

Referral for an Evaluation, Determination of Eligibility, Program Development

When a parent or teacher has a concern about a child's development and has attempted appropriate modifications of the environment and curriculum but still suspects a potential disability, he/she should follow these steps:

1. Submit a written request to the district's child study team for a special education evaluation. The written request (referral) must be submitted to the

appropriate school official. This may be the principal at the neighborhood school, the director of the preschool program where the child attends, the director of special education, or the child study team coordinator of the district.

2. The parent, preschool teacher and the child study team (school psychologist, school social worker, learning disabilities teacher-consultant, and speech and language pathologist) will meet to determine the need for evaluation.
3. After the completion of the evaluation and a determination of eligibility, an individualized education program (IEP) is developed for the child by an IEP team consisting of a parent, a child study team member, a district representative, the case manager, and general education teacher or provider. The team will determine modifications, interventions, support and supplementary services necessary to support the child.
4. To the maximum extent appropriate, preschool children eligible for special education will receive their preschool program with their peers without disabilities. In the event that there is a disagreement, the district has an obligation to inform parents of due process rights in referral.

It is important to note that a preschool teacher or administrator familiar with the district's preschool programs be available at all meetings when determining special education services. Classroom teachers should always be involved in the planning process.

Effective Inclusion

In ECPA and ELLI districts the ultimate goal is for inclusion of children with disabilities in general education preschool classrooms to the maximum extent appropriate and that these classrooms will mirror the ratio of children with disabilities that occurs naturally in populations of children. In this model, the classroom teacher has specialized knowledge about inclusion. The classroom teacher will collaborate with the child's parents and the disability specialists as determined by the child's IEP to meet the goals of the IEP. Under *New Jersey Administrative Code* (6A: 14-4.6h), classrooms can include up to six children with disabilities. However, each classroom should begin the school year with no more than four children with an IEP, in order to accommodate identifications after the school year has begun and new placements have been made.

Integrated Therapy

Just as it is necessary for teachers of children without disabilities to know their children well and to customize interactions to match children's individual needs, it is necessary for teachers of children with disabilities to choose intervention strategies to meet the goals of the child's IEP. Across all learning domains – social/emotional, cognitive, communication, and physical – effective interventions begin with the least intrusive and most naturalistic strategies and move toward more direct and structured strategies, as needed (Frede & Barnett and Lupo, 2000).

For all children, regardless of their special needs, cognitive, language, motor and social skills are best acquired during children's routine interactions and play activities. (Frede, Barnett, and Lupo, 2000). Therefore, therapists and itinerant special education teachers are urged to provide intervention directly in the classroom during the child's typical daily activities (e.g., while eating or playing). The purpose of this is primarily to model appropriate strategies for the teacher, as behavior change requires intensive consistent treatment and can only be effectively delivered by the classroom staff. Teachers are advised to integrate strategies for reaching children's IEP objectives, into each child-initiated and teacher-planned activity. Assessment of a child's progress should also be carried out within the context of the natural classroom environment, whenever possible.

Integrated therapy is given to a child with a disability during normal classroom activities (e.g., play, circle time, hand-washing.) When integrating therapy into the typical day and routine activities, all participants in the classroom environment take part. Even other children in the class will be part of various activities as the teacher, therapist, and parents work together to create situations where children can learn or "generalize" newly learned skills. The therapist will work directly in the classroom, modeling for the teacher, but also using the teacher's suggestions and lesson plans to help make the child's program part of the total classroom routine. The classroom staff members increase the impact of the therapist's time by supporting emerging skills in the classroom when the therapist is not there. Collaboration among therapists, parents, and teachers is essential for effective integrated therapy.

Transitions from One Program to Another

<u>Early Intervention</u>

The early intervention system, under the Department of Health and Senior Services, implements New Jersey's statewide system of services for infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities and their families.

Early intervention services are designed to address a problem or delay in development, as early as possible. The services are available for infants and toddlers up to age three. Public and private agencies serve as providers to address the needs of children and their families who meet the state eligibility criteria. Following the evaluation and assessment, an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is developed to describe the services that

are needed by the child and family and how they will be implemented. Services are provided by qualified personnel in natural environments, settings in which children without special needs ordinarily participate and that are most comfortable and convenient for the family, such as home, a community agency, or childcare setting.

An important part of early intervention services is assisting children and families to leave early intervention at the optimal time. This process is called transition. When a child is two years old, a transition information meeting is held with the parents, service coordinator, and others who have worked with the child and family to begin planning for services and supports that might be needed when the child turns three. As in other meetings about a child's needs and progress, it is essential that parents be part of the process. As a child approaches three years of age, the service coordinator helps with transition from early intervention to a preschool program and/or other support services that the child and family may need.

Often there is a gap in service for children receiving early intervention services who turn three years of age during the summer. Districts should provide opportunities for new teachers of children with IEPs to meet, consult, and plan with the child's teachers and therapists from their previous placement and, if possible, to observe the child in the setting. This would ensure minimal interruption of services and encourage a smooth transition to the next setting (see other transition techniques in Section 6, Continuity and Transition).

6. CONTINUITY AND TRANSITION

The literature on early childhood practices provides a strong rationale for creating continuity in transitions during this period. Achievements made during preschool, especially cognitive gains, sometimes fade as children move through subsequent grades (Shore, 1998). Changes in program components such as parent involvement, classroom organization, and teaching style, may explain the differences in growth (O'Brien, 1991). Similarly, children have been found to have difficulty adjusting to classrooms where the rules, routines, and underlying philosophy differ from their previous experience (Shore, 1998).

Transitions to Preschool

For many children and their families, their first major transition occurs when they enter preschool. Preparing families for the transition process helps orient families to the program, anticipate services based on each child's need, and provides valuable insight to information about the child and family. Family participation also helps reduce some of the stress that may be associated with transition.

The level and type of participation prior to enrollment will vary across families, based on each family's interests, resources, and general ability to be involved. Offering a range of flexible ways to learn about the program will help ensure that most families are oriented to the program. The following activities will foster smooth transitions:

- Offer parent meetings focused on child and family expectations and services in the preschool setting. Topics can include parent role, curriculum, and family services.
- Send out invitations to visit the preschool.
- Have an open house for families.
- Hold a child orientation at the preschool prior to attending.
- Set up home visits for teachers to meet the families.

To facilitate a smooth transition for toddlers who attend child care or for children with disabilities already in early intervention programs, preschool teachers should meet, consult, and plan with the child's teachers and therapists, when appropriate, from their previous placement. If possible, they should observe the child in the setting (see Transitions to New Settings, Special Education, Section 5).

Transitions within Settings

One way to facilitate continuity and minimize transition is by implementing multi-age practices. The term "multi-age" refers to the grouping of children so that the age span of the class is greater than one year. This technique uses both teaching practices and the makeup of the classroom to maximize the benefits of interaction and cooperation among children of various ages. In mixed- or multi-age classes, teachers encourage children with different experiences and stages of development to interact with each other throughout

the day, naturally facilitating emerging skills (Katz, 1998). Another way to minimize effects of transitions is to loop, or keep the same group of children and adults together for more than one year.

Optimal Mixed-age Groupings

Ideally, districts will create multi-age settings for three- and four-year-old children. Children of both ages will stay with the same adults in the same room for a two-year period, creating a "family" type learning environment that includes the children, teachers, and parents.

Cross-age learning allows for social interaction, modeling, mentoring, and leadership among children. A child may accomplish something earlier with support from a more advanced peer while the older child experiences feelings of confidence and compassion (Vygotsky, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978; Slavin, 1987). A multi-age setting allows teachers to foster an emotionally secure environment for children to grow, learn, take risks and experience success. While children are developing social skills, learning responsibility, and engaging in more complex play, teachers are generally more child-centered, as they must adeptly accommodate individual strengths, interests, and needs. The two-year time period helps ensure that teachers, parents, and children know each other well and develop a working partnership.

Same-age Groupings

If a district is unable to provide multi-age classes, looping can be used on its own, allowing same-age children (all threes or all fours) to remain with the same adults for two or more years. If the children must move from one room to another from year one to year two, the teachers and children would travel together.

For community partners, looping up through second or third grade is usually not practical. Therefore, looping with the same adults in the same classroom environment should continue to the highest available "grade level" in the partnering agency.

<u>Transitions to Kindergarten</u>

It is also important to smooth out the transition from preschool to the next setting. This will help prepare children for the new situation and increase the involvement of parents and families in the process (Transition Planning Guide, 1999; Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002). General transition activities are as follows:

- Invite families to visit children's future kindergarten.
- Distribute home-learning activities, including summer book lists and other literacy activities for the summer months prior to kindergarten entry.
- Partner with local parent-teacher association to inform parents about how they can be involved in their child's kindergarten setting and connect new families with families currently enrolled in the school.

- Disseminate information to parents on the transition to kindergarten, including kindergarten registration guidelines, kindergarten options in the community, information on specific schools once placements have been made, and health and nutrition information to ensure that children are healthy when entering school.
- Offer early registration for kindergarten so that families have time to prepare children for their new setting and specific teachers can contact their prospective students well before the first day of school.
- Arrange field trips to participating elementary schools and kindergarten classrooms to increase children's familiarity with the new environment.
- Invite future teachers to visit children and give parent presentations.
- Ask current preschool teachers to visit the participating classrooms. These visits can promote the sharing of curriculum information, early childhood strategies, philosophies, and special needs of specific children.
- Offer meetings focusing on child and family expectations in the next setting to better prepare children and their families for the opportunities and challenges they will encounter. Parenting and curriculum, the school district's structure, family services and advocacy, and other topics can be covered.
- Hold workshops that combine both preschool and elementary school teachers to discuss and coordinate curriculum and teaching practices, ensuring continuity from one setting to the next.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

The goal of school health services is to strengthen and facilitate the educational process by improving and protecting the health status of children and staff. According to the "School Health Services Guidelines" developed by the New Jersey Department of Education in 2001, the health and intellectual development of children are inextricably related. For instance, screening of students for current immunization helps to reduce absences due to illness. Screening for vision or hearing problems removes potential obstacles to learning. Health services staff provide physical and emotional support so that children can better cope with periodic illness and injury, which are commonly a part of growing up. Schools also provide daily support to students with chronic health needs.

School Nurse

The school nurse is a health services specialist who assists students, families, and staff in attaining and maintaining optimal health and health attitudes. School nurses strengthen and facilitate the educational process by improving and protecting the health status of children and staff.

Food and Nutrition

Children should receive adequate nutrition and education concerning health and nutrition. Meals and/or snacks should be planned to meet a child's nutritional requirements as recommended by the Adult and Child Care Food Program of the United States Department of Agriculture.

FAMILY SERVICES

The creation of a family/school partnership is an essential ingredient of an effective preschool program (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Epstein, 1986). When teachers actively involve parents in their children's school experience, parents are more committed to the program's goals (Henderson & Berla, 1994) and report greater interest and satisfaction with their children's education (Epstein, 1986). With systematic coordination between home and school, we can more meaningfully support all aspects of the child's life. If educators and parents work together, children have a chance of reaching their maximum potential.

Many families encounter challenges that place children at risk. Basic issues involving clothing, shelter, and medical care add to family stress and interfere with a child's ability to learn. Program staff must partner with parents and support them in their role by understanding their perspectives, enhancing their understanding of child development, assisting them in reaching their goals, and involving them in the program. Every program must carefully balance knowledge of the obstacles that their families face with high expectations. The greatest predictor of a child's life success, regardless of education and income levels, is a family's ability to do the following (NEA Communications, 2002):

- Create a home that encourages learning by reading aloud to and otherwise positively interacting with children;
- Become involved in their child's education at home and at school;
- Actively organize and monitor children's time; and
- Get involved with school early on.

Defining Family Involvement

Family makeup varies widely and can include parents, stepparents, grandparents, brothers, sisters and others living in the household. There are numerous and varied ways to effectively engage family members, from helping out at the school to taking an active role in the decision-making processes. These differences can be misconstrued as indifference to children's education. It is critical that schools develop policies that are sensitive to, and reflective of, the communities they serve.

General Ways to Include Families (Epstein, 1997)

Communicating
Communication between home and school is regular and two-way.
Parenting
Parenting skills are promoted and supported.
Student Learning
Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
Volunteering
Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.
School Decision-Making and Advocacy

Parents are involved in the decisions that affect children and families.

Collaborating with Community

Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families and student learning.

Specific Ways to Include Families

The best way to accommodate the varying types and degrees of family participation is to offer a range of flexible ways to get involved. The following approaches easily adapt to each individual family's changing needs and circumstances:

- Create an atmosphere in which teachers, administrators, and families all value parental involvement. Communicate to parents that their involvement and support makes a great deal of difference in children's development.
- Include teachers, parents and other family members in the design of family services plans.
- Ask families to develop their own participation goals.
- Design a volunteer calendar and encourage parents to participate, when possible.
- Regularly communicate. Focus on verbal communication when written language is an obstacle.
- Create a browsing and checkout library with books, videos, cassettes, brochures, and magazines.
- Make it easy for parents to attend meetings and visit the school by offering transportation and child care.
- Hold meetings at different times of the day to accommodate working schedules.
- Send frequent communications to families about both individual children and classroom content. Provide information about key child developmental milestones and ways to nurture and support growth. Offer specific, individualized strategies that guide families how to help at home.
- Act as a clearinghouse for external supports such as local businesses, health care agencies, and colleges, making services more accessible.
- Solicit the help of interested parent partners.

PROGRAM EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT

ECPA and ELLI programs are committed to providing high-quality programs for young children and their families. To create and maintain quality, programs should conduct a self-evaluation. The evaluation process examines the total program, from the quality and nature of staff-child interaction to the developmental appropriateness of the activities, health and safety of the setting, teacher-child ratios, staff qualifications, administration, and ability to accommodate the needs of the children and the community. The focus is on how well the components of the program work together to support each child's learning and development. The self-evaluation should be conducted yearly with representatives from all members of the program. Parent surveys, teacher surveys, administrator evaluations, and classroom observations should be used to determine how well the program is working. The Self-Assessment Validation System (NJDOE-OECE, 2003) was developed to assess implementation of the regulations and guidelines for the Abbott Preschool Program. This system consists of the following components and can serve as a benchmark for ECPA and ELLI districts program self-evaluation:

Community Involvement

An Early Childhood Advisory Council is in place and participates in program planning, community assessment, and the self-evaluation.

Recruitment and Enrollment

The school district actively recruits eligible children throughout the year using multiple strategies. The help of churches, public agencies, and other groups is sought.

Administration

All staff qualifications, teacher-child ratios, and other staffing and administrative requirements are met. Staff-administrator communication is encouraged via regular staff meetings and in-class observations.

The Educational Components

<u>Curriculum</u>

- Curriculum guidelines as described in the *Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations: Standards of Quality* are met.
- Teachers demonstrate knowledge of how children learn and develop.
- Teacher expectations vary appropriately for children of differing ages and abilities. Individual differences are respected.
- All aspects of the child are supported, including language development, cognitive development, social and emotional development, and physical development.
- Children work and play individually or in small groups, minimizing whole-group activities with a balance between child-initiated and teacher-initiated activities.

Assessment

- Children's progress is regularly tracked via portfolio recordkeeping systems and observation.
- Child observation and portfolios are used to plan curricula and strategies.
- Screening devices are used appropriately.

Professional Development

- Professional development guidelines as described in the *Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations: Standards of Quality* are met.
- A professional development plan is in place that meets the requirements and any additional needs of the children being served.
- Training topics cover all aspects of the child's development, as well as the specific needs of the program.
- Appropriate training for administrators, therapists, and other personnel is provided.
- Appropriate assistance and training is provided to teachers of English language learners, and teachers working with children with special needs.
- Systematic classroom evaluation is used to determine professional development topics.

Supporting English Language Learners

- Teachers use strategies to support English language learners.
- The focus is on helping children achieve English competency and maintaining their first languages.
- The curriculum provides numerous language enrichment opportunities.

Special Education Services

- Children with special needs are served in least restrictive environments in a child-oriented, least intrusive and naturalistic fashion.
- The proportion of children with and without special needs reflects that of the general population.
- Inclusion is used whenever possible.
- The IEP team includes the teacher, parent, child study team member and special education personnel.
- Concerted efforts are made to naturally integrate therapies and special services, and to communicate to teachers and other personnel following transitions to new settings.

Continuity and Transition

- Multi-age practices are used that maximize the benefits of interaction and cooperation among children of various ages.
- Families, teachers, and children are prepared for transitions to new settings.

Health and Nutrition

- All children receive health screening upon entry into the district.
- Meal and snack requirements established by US Department of Agriculture are in place.

Family Services

- Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.
- Parents are partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
- Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.
- Communication between home and school is regular and two-way.
- Parenting skills are promoted and supported.
- Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
- Barriers to family involvement, such as transportation and language, are reduced.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Accreditation Criteria & Procedures of the National Association for the Education of Young Children With Interpretations. (1998), National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington, DC. p. 19

Alexander & Entwistle. (1989). cited from *Inequality at the Starting Gate*; *Social Background Differences in Achievement as Children Begin School*, Valerie Lee & David T. Burkam. Economic Policy Institute, Washington, D.C. 2002 (p. 1).

Allison, N. (1999). Pre-K possibilities. *American School & University*. From http://asumag.com/ar/university_prek_possibilities/index.htm.

Barnett, W. S. (1996). *Lives in the balance: Age-27 benefit-cost analysis of the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program* (Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 11). Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.

Berman, P., Minicucci, C., McLaughlin, B., Nelson, B., and Woodworth, K. (1995). *School Reform and Student Diversity: Case Studies of Exemplary Practices for LEP Students.* The Institute for Policy Analysis and Research, and the National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning.

Bohan-Baker, M. & Little, P. M. D. (2002*). The Transition to Kindergarten: A Review of Current Research and Promising Practices to Involve Families*. Harvard Family Research Project, April 2002

Building Officials and Code Administrators International. (1996). *The BOCA national building code.* 13th ed. Country Club Hills, IL: Building Officials and Code Administrators International.

Campbell, F. A., Pungello, E. P., Miller-Johnson, S., Burchinal, M., & Ramey, C. T. (in press). The Development of Cognitive and Academic Abilities: Growth Curves from an Early Childhood Educational Experiment. *Developmental Psychology.*

Early Care and Education Coalition. (2000). *Quality indicators for preschool facilities: Recommendations of the Early Care and Education Coalition.* From http://www.acnj.org/main.asp?uri=1003&di=109.htm&dt=0&chi=2.

ESL Standards for Pre-K-12 Students. (2002). TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages).

Epstein, J. L. (1997). *PTA standards for parent involvement.*

Epstein, J. L. (1986). *Parents' reactions to teacher practices of parent involvement.* Elementary School Journal, 86, 277-294.

Frank Moya Architects. (2002). *The Hispanic Directors Association preschool prototype design (Final draft).* Trenton, NJ: Frank Moya Architects.

Harms, T., Clifford, R. M. & Cryer, D. (1998). *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (Revised Edition)*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Hart, B & Risley, T. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children*, Brookes Publishing Co, Baltimore, MD

Henderson, A. T. & Berla, N. (1994). *A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement.* Washington, DC: National Committee for Citizens in Education.

Henderson, A. T. & Berla, N. (2002). *Parent Involvement: Does it Matter to Student Achievement?*, NEA Communications, May

High/Scope Program Quality Assessment (PQA). (1998) High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, Ypsilanti, MI

Holman, S. T. (2002). *Building quality child care facilities*. Early Childhood Facilities, Pennington, NJ

Katz, L. (1998). *Multi-Age Caregiving: The benefits of the mix*. *Child Care Information Exchange*, 11, 46-49.

Lockwood, A. T. (forthcoming). *Conversations with educational leaders: Contemporary viewpoints on education in America.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Lockwood, A.T., Stinnette, L.J., & D'Amico, J. (1996). The importance of collective endeavor. *New Leaders for Tomorrow's Schools, 2(1),* 3-4.

Massachusetts Board of Education. (2001). *Early childhood program standards for center-based programs for three- and four-year olds (Draft).* Malden, MA: Massachusetts Board of Education, Early Childhood Advisory Council.

McLaughlin, B. (1995). *Fostering second language learning in young children*. Educational Practice Report No. 14; National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning.

McWilliam, R. A. (2001). *INTEGRATE model for natural environments in early intervention.* Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Meisels, S. J., Marsden, D. B., Wishke, M. S. & Henderson, L. W. (1997). *The Early Screening Inventory-Revised*. Ann Arbor, MI: Rebus Inc.

Continuity For Success: Transition Planning Guide. (1999). National PTA

New Jersey Department of Education. (2001). *School health services guidelines.* Trenton, NJ: New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Educational Support Services.

O' Brien (1991). *Promoting successful transitions into school: A review of current intervention practices*. Lawrence, KS: Kansas University Early Childhood Research Institute.

Ramey, C. T., & Campbell, F. A. (1984). *Preventive education for high-risk children: Cognitive consequences of the Carolina Abecedarian Project*. American Journal of Mental Deficiency, 88, 515-523.

Ramey, C. T., Campbell, F. A., Burchinal, M., Skinner, M. L., Gardner, D. M., & Ramey, S. L. (2000). *Persistent effects of early intervention on high-risk children and their mothers*. Applied Developmental Science, 4, 2-14.

Reynolds, A. J. (2000). *Success in Early Intervention: The Chicago Child-Parent Centers.* Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press

Sandall, S., McLean, M. E., & Smith, B. J. (2000). *DEC recommended practices in early intervention/early childhood special education.* Denver, CO: Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children.

School facilities survey. (2002). Presented by Facilities Subcommittee of the Early Care and Education Coalition at the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association Conference, New Jersey Education Association & The Public Education Institute

Schweinhart, L. J., Barnes, H. V., & Weikart, D. P. (1993). *Significant benefits: The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 27* (Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 10). Ypsilanti: High/Scope Press.

Shore, R. (1998). *Ready Schools: A report of the Goal 1 Ready Schools Resource Group*. Washington, DC: The National Education Goals Panel.

Slavin, R.E. (1987). Developmental and Motivational Perspectives on Cooperative Learning: A Reconciliation." Child Development, 58: 1161-1167.

Snow, C. E. (2002). *Looking Closely at Second Language Learning: An Interview with Shattuck Professor Catherine Snow,* Harvard Graduate School of Education News. October 1 2002.

Snow, C. E. (1993). *Bilingualism and second language acquisition*. In J. Berko Gleason & N Bernstein Ratner (Eds.), Psycholinguistics (pp. 391-416). New York: Harcourt Brace

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2000) *Head Start center design guide.* Arlington, VA: National Head Start Training and Technical Assistance Resource Center. From http://www.headstartinfo.org/pdf/hscenterdesignguide.pdf.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1962). *Thought and language*. (Edited by Alex Kozulin) Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind In Society: The Development Of Higher Psychological Processes.* Edited by M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, and E. Souberman. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978.

Walsh, S., Smith, B.J., & Taylor, R. (2000). *IDEA requirements for preschoolers with disabilities: IDEA early childhood policy and practice guide.* Reston, VA: IDEA Partnerships, The Council for Exceptional Children.

Wolery, R. A. & Odom, S. L. (2000). *An administrator's guide to preschool inclusion*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Center, Early Childhood Research Institute on Inclusion.

Zehr, M. A. (2000). *NYC Study Adds Fuel to Bilingual Debate*. Education Week, September 13, 2000.

APPENDIX

What Does High-Quality Preschool Look Like?
A DAY IN AN INTENSIVE, HIGH-QUALITY PRESCHOOL

Ms. Guzman is the assistant teacher in a preschool classroom of 15 children from diverse income, racial, ability, and linguistic backgrounds. Each day during morning meeting, a story is read in both Spanish and English, and sometimes the children take roles and act out the story. Sometimes it is a story that has been written by one of the children in the publishing area during free play time. Today, Ms. Guzman uses one of the strategies that she and the speech therapist devised for helping a child in the classroom who has severe articulation problems. She and the fifteen children take turns thinking of sounds and patterns to chant, such as "Tuh, --- tuh, tuh" or "Beep, ---- b, b, b, beep, beep." She asks the children, "What sounds do you hear in that chant? . . . .What letter do you think might make that sound? . . . . . Who can think of a chant that would rhyme with "beep?" While conducting this activity she translates each of her questions into Spanish. She responds to children in the language they speak to her but translates for the rest of the group. They hear the story and sing all of the songs in both languages. The English-speaking children are learning Spanish as the Spanish-speaking children learn English.

It's breakfast time, and Mr. Jackson, the teacher, is sitting with eight children at a large table while Ms. Guzman has breakfast with the other seven children. Mr. Jackson brings down the calendar where they write the names of children who have already had turns passing out bowls, napkins, and spoons. After giving them a few moments to study the calendar Mr. Jackson asks, "Who hasn't had a turn to help this week?" Five children raise their hands. Monique says to Simone "Put your hand down, girl. You went on Monday. See, there's your name right there." She points to Steven's name on Monday. Simone replies disgustedly, "That doesn't say Simone. There's no 'm.'" Mr. Jackson moves the calendar closer to Monique and says, "You're right. Simone does start with an 's' like this name, but listen to other sounds." He slowly enunciates Steven and children name some of the letter sounds they hear. Three children are chosen to be helpers, and Mr. Jackson assures the others that they will have a turn at lunchtime. Maurice studies the calendar while the dishes are passed out, and children help themselves to breakfast. He comments, "There sure are a lot of twos on this calendar, Teacher." "What an interesting observation, Maurice. What else can someone tell me about the numbers on the calendar?" Mr. Jackson asks. Children notice how many ones there are and how few there are of other digits. Mr. Jackson says, "After breakfast it will be free play time. Maurice, would you and some friends like to make a chart of how many of each number there are on the November calendar? Marta's mother is here today and might like to help you with that."

After breakfast, children are working at child chosen activities in the clearly defined interest areas. They have turned the House Area into a grocery store after visiting a local grocery store last week. Children buy and sell groceries, and "write" shopping lists, labels, and price lists. In the block area, four children are making ramps and Mr. Jackson is helping them figure out how to measure which cars go the farthest, and how changing the angle of the ramp affects the distance. Marta's mother is helping Maurice and Monique make a chart of the numbers in the November calendar. In the toy area, two children are sorting shells into different containers. Tonia, Marta and Brenda are building with inch cube blocks. Marta's building keeps falling down. Ms. Guzman sits next to Marta and observes for a short while. Marta pushes the blocks away in disgust. In Spanish, Ms. Guzman asks, "What's happening to your building, Marta?" "The walls keep falling down," Marta complains. "That's making you feel frustrated, isn't it? Look at Brenda's building. Her walls are staying up. Maybe, you could ask her how she does that . . . Tonia, I have to talk to Luis. Can you help Marta talk to Brenda about how to get her walls to stay up?" This conversation has been entirely in Spanish. Tonia, who is bilingual, asks Brenda to help Marta. She says to Marta, "Ahora, di 'thank you.'" ["Now, you say 'thank you.'"]

In the art area, two children are painting at the easel. Ramona is painting a peacock from the perspective of a child who is standing eye-to-eye with it. The peacock's tail is painted in large oblong shapes similar to the NBC peacock. On the other side of the easel, Jon has three paint jars with white, red and blue paint. He puts his paintbrush in the red, then dips it into the white and makes dabbing marks on the edge of the paper. He exclaims, "Look, Teacher, I made different colored pinks!" Mr. Jackson asks, "How did you do that?. . . Tell Ramona what you discovered." Tiffany has brought a cookie sheet over from the House Area and is filling it with play dough cookies. She rolls the play dough into a log and then slices it. She fills about half of the cookie sheet with green cookies and the other half with yellow ones. "Do you think you have the same number of yellow cookies as green ones?" Mr. Jackson asks. Tiffany starts to count the cookies of each color but keeps loosing track of which cookies she has counted. Mr. Jackson helps her devise a way to match one green with one yellow cookie and then compare the total number. Josue is building a robot out of small boxes, toilet paper tubes, buttons, cloth and other scrap materials. Iris has written her name in glue and is placing buttons on the glue letters. For each line in a letter, for example, the angled part of a capital A, she uses a different type of button. Ms. Guzman comments, "It seems to take a lot more buttons to fill up the R than it does the I." Iris begins to count the number of buttons in each letter.

After about an hour of play, children and teachers clean up the room. The teachers help the children compare the sizes and other attributes of toys as they put them away, organize the tasks by planning what to clean up first, second, etc., and think about the time it takes to clean up different types of messes.

After reading Effie during story time, the teacher is working with eight children at a small table. Each child has a mixing bowl and spoon in front of him. After discussing how the characters in Effie are made out of play dough, the teacher introduces the activity; "You need four different ingredients. Let me show you. The first ingredient is flour (puts

a bag of flour in the middle of the table), the second ingredient is salt, and the third ingredient is oil. Do you think we have all of the ingredients?" Tiffany: "No! We need more!" The teacher asks, "How many more? (Children look puzzled) Well, I said we need four different ingredients and how many do we have on the table? . . . . (Tiffany counts three.) So, how many more ingredients do we need to make four? . . . That's right Ramona. We need one more ingredient, and that ingredient is . . (showing them a water bottle). (As children begin to grab for ingredients.) Wait a minute. How do you know how much of each ingredient you need? . . . To make your play dough just right, you need three cups, each one a different size. You need a big cup (puts 1 cup in the middle of the table), a medium size cup (puts 1/3 cup in the middle), and a small spoon (puts tablespoon in the middle)." Josue says, "That's a tiny cup" (pointing to tablespoon). Brenda: "That's the papa, mama, and baby cup" (pointing to each cup)!

The teacher holds up bag of flour. "The first ingredient you need is flour. You need the most of flour. Which cup should you fill with flour? (Some children look confused but two children point to the biggest cup) Ramona, why do you think you should fill that cup with flour?" Ramona: "Because it's the biggest!" The teacher replies, "That's right. It's the biggest cup and we need the most of flour. Everyone needs to pour 1 cup of flour into his or her bowl. (The teacher puts two more measuring cups on the table, and children take turns measuring and pouring 1 cup of flour into their bowl.) The second ingredient you need to put into your bowl is salt. You need a medium-size amount of salt. Which cup should you fill with salt?" Tony: (points to 1/3 cup) "That one! Because it's not too big or too small. It's in the middle." They continue comparing amounts until they have the entire recipe. Then they mix and play with the play dough.

Later in the day after outdoor play, lunch, nap, another story read and acted out, and another free play period . . . .

The same small group of children works with the teacher to add red food coloring to their play dough. The children draw the number of drops of food coloring they would like to add to their play dough on a small card. They work together to put the balls of play dough in order from lightest to darkest comparing the number of drops written for each child with the color of the play dough.